

Metering the Large Format Photograph

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zone 7-7.5 and then burned a little

7x17 Ritter camera, 360mm lens, HP5+ film developed in Max Pyro



zone 3-3.5

zone 7

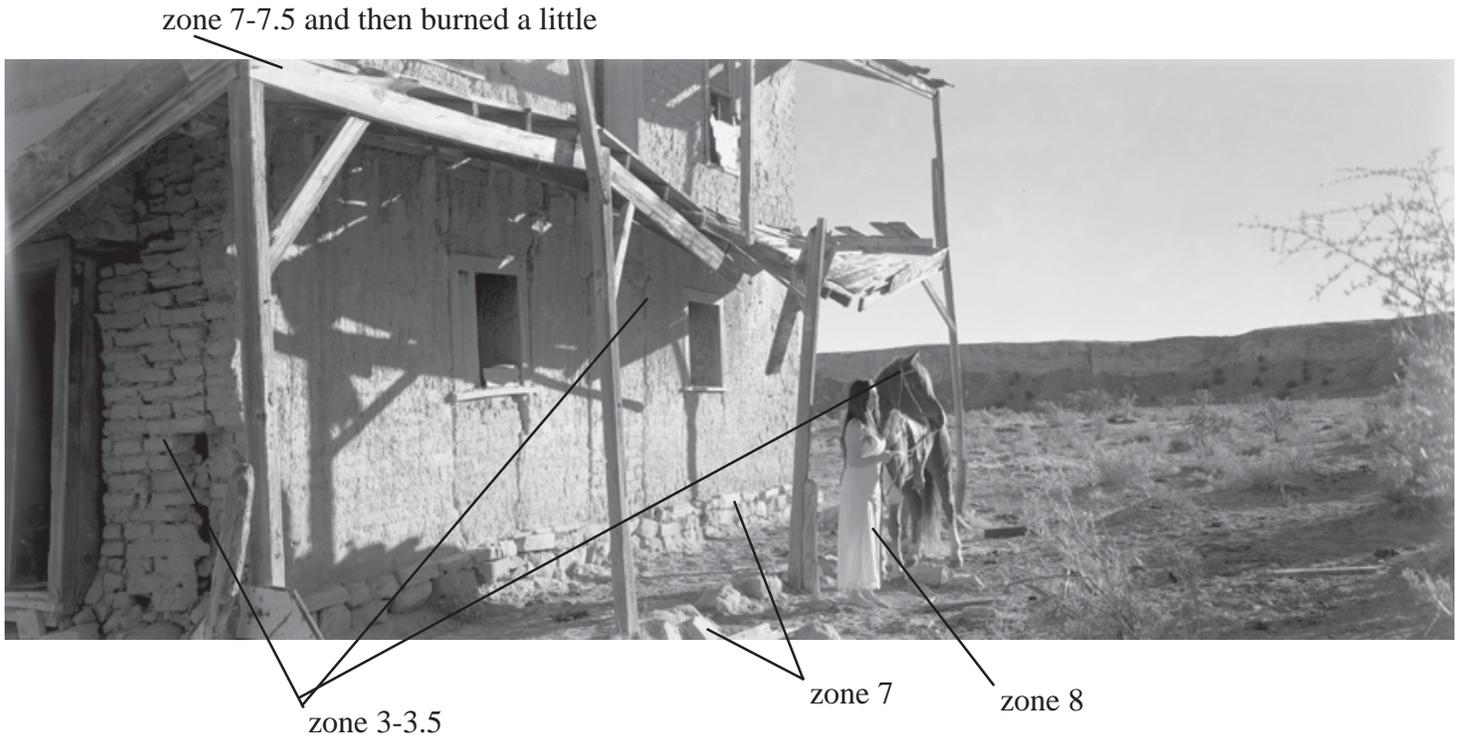
zone 8

As many readers of *View Camera* magazine know, I prefer taking spot meter readings to calculate the correct exposure for my photographs. Using the spot meter is much more precise than simply taking an overall average reading, or using an incident meter. The spot meter will actually give you the contrast range between the shadows and the high values from the camera's position.

I have tested my film and film developer combination for the printing paper I use - a vc paper w/o a filter which is the equivalent of about a grade 2. There is an article on testing for your personal EI for your film, film developer, and paper combination in the Subscriber's Section of this web site. This same testing procedure works for graded and vc paper.

With a staining developer, either PMK or Max Pyro, my normal scene consists of holding detail and texture from zones 3-8. Some people use zones 3-7. Either spread is fine as long as you've done your own testing. If you test properly, you can hold this range with a non-staining developer as well.

In this scene I used a #16 filter. This is a medium orange and is designed to slightly darken the sky. When using any type of filter, I always meter through the filter rather than applying an arbitrary filter factor. The effect of a filter, and its strength in any given situation, is dependent upon the color of the light source and the color of the reflective surface(s) of the objects in the scene. In this late afternoon light, which is warmer than



mid-day light, more of the light will make it through the filter - thus the importance of metering through the filter for each situation. Many of the surfaces in the scene are some version of yellow and orange as well.

In addition to metering through the filter, I use the Hutchings Filter Factor recommendations. There is a PDF chart of these in the Subscriber's Section as well, and this chart is in the Jan/Feb 09 issue. In addition to the suggestion to meter through the filter, he suggests then applying a filter factor depending on the filter. In the case of the #16, he suggests adding one additional stop of exposure.

Once I had everything in place, the camera, and models, I took the meter readings of the darkest and lightest areas I cared about. By this I mean where I wanted to hold onto some feeling of the detail and texture of the materials. I did not want the areas under the upstairs landing to become a black hole in the photograph, and I did not want the white on the model's dress to wash out and become pure paper white. The spread here was 5 stops and I based my exposure on placing the shadows in zones 3-3.5. With this placement, and with the knowledge I had from testing for my own EI and developing time, I could easily protect the tones in these deep shadow areas. This meant the white of the model's

dress, with my normal development, would land on zone 8, a nice bright white but still with some feeling of detail and texture. If the spread had been greater, I would shorten my development time. If the spread was less than desired, I would simply extend my developing time. In a perfect world, one we can all aspire to, all of my negatives will print on the same grade or contrast filter.

I tray process all of my film, regardless of the size of the film. In the Subscriber's Section of the web site are articles on tray processing in general, and specifically, on how I process this larger film. One of the advantages to tray processing is that I can do several sheets at once, but all for different development times. In an enclosed container, all sheets have to be developed for the same length of time, eliminating one of the advantages of using sheet film.

The art and craft of large format photography, and the use of sheet film, gives you the opportunity to take your time and properly compose, expose, and develop each sheet of film. Take your time and enjoy the process.